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HE SAW A MAN, BLIND FROM HIS BIRTH.

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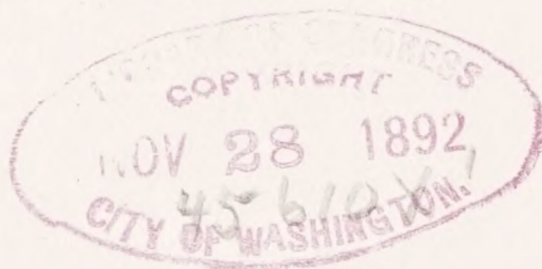
LITTLE BO.

A STUDY IN THE NINTH OF JOHN.

BY

erman
RUSSELL H. CONWELL,

PASTOR AT THE TEMPLE (GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH), PHILADELPHIA.



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*“Now let us thank the Eternal Power : convinced
That Heaven but tries our virtue by affliction,
That oft the cloud which wraps the present hour
Serves but to brighten all our future days.”*

LITTLE BO.

I.

THE BABE.

JESUS, the coming King, lay wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger at Bethlehem. Little Bo, who was to be one of his most powerful vassals, was also a baby in a humble home in Jerusalem. Jesus was divine ; little Bo was human. Jesus came to suffer spiritual pangs for the sins of the world deeper than any human heart had felt ; Bo came to suffer physical disability, the sadness of which Jesus only knew by divine sympathy.

Jesus the Saviour, whose advent the angels celebrated, and whose star pierced the distant East, around whose humble manger the wise men knelt, and before whom the nations were to pay homage, presents a figure so heavenly and so sublime that we approach it with feelings of awe and worship. Had we seen him in the stable, and understood his nature and purpose, we would not venture to take him in our arms, play with his dimpled fingers, or kiss his rosy cheek. We are unworthy to approach so near a being so pure, the heir to the throne of heaven.

But we go into the home of little Bo without hesitation. There

are none of us so poor or ignorant that we may not enter the little tenement where he was born without feeling unworthy. His faithful parents had set up their humble housekeeping at Jerusalem in the stormiest period in its exciting history. The local conflicts between the various nationalities represented in the holy city, the continuous insurrections against the soldiers of oppressive Rome, the heavy taxation, the uncertainties of business, and the unprofitableness of agriculture, had made the poor of Jerusalem very poor.

The parents of little Bo were among the poorest of Jerusalem's poor. Yet they were happy in the quiet nest of their home life, with a bare shelter from the storms, and sufficient food to maintain them in health. No social depression, no lack of luxury, can destroy the ambition, nor discolor the hopes of the young who have just taken a little home for themselves. The dazzling beauty of love's early morning hides all grosser objects, while he who is happy with little is far better off than he who is unhappy with much.

That which they lacked in their youth they confidently expected to get in the after years. They lived as uncounted others have lived, in the bright air-castles of the future more than in their actual home. They, probably, had kind parents who prayed for their prosperity and sympathized with their privations, as well as friends who made a gala day at their wedding. These young parents, we may well imagine, believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses ; read the ancient prophets every day ; made their simple sacrifices in the temple at regular intervals ; were religiously obedient unto the laws which God had laid down for the government of his people.



HE ANOINTED THE EYES OF THE BLIND MAN.

The precepts of Solomon were familiar. The ten commandments were written on their hearts, and no home in all Jerusalem contained more devoted and consistent worshipers than that in which little Bo was born.

Prayerful, truthful, industrious, charitable, and affectionate, these parents bore an unspotted reputation, and seemed certain to prosper if God's promises to the noble and good were to be literally fulfilled. They had few household utensils, but they had strong faith. They had few influential friends, but they had the promise of God. They had little learning, but they had willing hands. They lived in the midst of uncertainty, turmoil, danger, hatred, but their faithful trust lifted them above it all.

But, alas ! how sad is the first chapter in their married life ! As when one who climbs the snowy peaks of Everest, and reaches a point from which the sublime panorama of the Indies stretches away presenting the most interesting and glorious views, suddenly feels the mountain shake, the snowdrifts move, hears the ice-cliffs crack, and is irresistibly hurled down the precipice he has climbed with so much labor, and is buried in the overwhelming snows of the descending avalanche, so to this affectionate, hopeful pair came an awful, crushing disappointment.

Sorrow seems infinitely sadder when set in immediate contrast with the brightest, dearest experience of life, as death is most terrible when nearest the marriage altar, an eclipse most impressive in the morning, poison most bitter in the cup of friendship, and the cavern most dark at midday.

Poor Bo ! The harp was full strung to welcome his appearance. The cup was filled to the brim to drink to his health. The turtle doves tenderly cooed their farewells as they prepared for the sacrifice, while friends and relatives had carefully arranged to make up in congratulations what the festival might lack in luxuries. But, alas ! the harp-strings remained forebodingly silent, the cup of friendship untasted, and the half-uttered shouts, songs, and congratulations died in the throat, or flowed back upon the heart in painful throbs. *Poor little baby Bo was blind.*

Was there ever a cup so deliciously sweet which so suddenly turned to bitterness ? Mothers have held their offspring for a few hours in joy, and have seen their eyes close in sudden death with an awful sense of disappointment and heart-breaking grief, but in that day, so frightfully superstitious, to have a child born blind was a far greater calamity.

This lovely Jewish girl-mother was stricken with a horror at the view of her sightless child such as no modern mother may ever know. The dreadful nature of the event cannot be appreciated in these days of Christian enlightenment. It was perhaps the most dreaded by Jewish parents of all the possible calamities and terrors which could come to family life. It was such a fearful curse. It was sincerely believed to be a direct expression of the angry Jehovah cursing the parents and child for some heinous transgression.

The rabbis, priests, and judges taught distinctly that the parents of a blind child had committed, consciously or unconsciously, some awful, unpardonable sin ; that their God thought of them only in

terrible threats ; and the angels hid their faces as they passed their dwellings. If their lives had been upright, conscientious, and pure, so far as they could see, yet the father and mother of a blind child were none the less sure, that by some mistake, oversight, or error, they had in some dreadful way offended God beyond hope of reconciliation. If their characters had been beyond any possibility of reproach or criticism, yet their relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances, were positive beyond discussion that one or both of the parents had knowingly committed some one of the terrible crimes against which the earthquakes and lightnings of Sinai had declaimed.

Often the parents so blamed one another, that the strongest human love was not able to overcome the feeling on the part of each that the other had been guilty of some sin or crime directly inspired by Satan. Oh, what an unwelcome stranger little Bo was in this cold world, where there is none too much of tenderness or love under the best of circumstances.

I do not know precisely why I call him Bo, or why I should not call him Jo ; but Boaz was a favorite name at the time of his birth, as it had been before, and the shortened form of it, Bo, seems so naturally to spring to my lips. And it will be just as well to give him that name and furnish him with an identity, whatever his real name may have been.

Poor Bo ! The child that would have been welcomed as the sweetest and richest of the blessings of God, was received as a dreadful burden and an abiding curse. The smile on the faces of relatives faded, and showers of tears came in its place. The gifts

to be presented by acquaintances were hidden away, or sold again in the mart. Congratulations became groans. The birthday festival turned to a thirty years' funeral.

But, thank God, the parents' love for each other was stronger than bigoted superstition. Though their hopes of social distinction, or of wealth for themselves or their children were crushed ; although they dwelt under the blackest shadow of shame and disgrace which could come to a Jewish family, yet with an affection that was heroic, with a fidelity that was braver than the deeds of the patriotic Maccabees, they still loved each other, and wept together as they looked on the sightless eyes of their child.

The slow years would roll on in which poverty might pinch them more tightly in their shame, yet in which their disgrace might be somewhat mitigated by the appearance of other children, whose vision might be clear ; while the father's ambitionless persistency in some humble occupation might possibly secure him a more permanent though more meagre support than came to the changeable, ambitious ones in those uncertain times.

Little Bo grew heavier day by day upon his mother's breast, innocently unconscious of the awful weight he has laid upon her heart. Soon he creeps about the single room in which that sad mother grinds the corn or bakes the bread. A little later, his tottering footsteps give their uncertain patter upon the chamber floor, and his voice is heard as at his sightless play he passes the time on the house-top. I see him at night when his weary mother has taken him in her arms to rock him to sleep. I can hear her trembling voice as



GO, WASH IN THE POOL OF SILOAM.

she sings a sweet Jewish lullaby, or chants so pathetically the psalm, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" I can see him nestling closer to her breast, as he is startled in his childish dreams by the fall of tears upon his face. I see him lying by the flickering lamplight in his rude crib, softly sleeping, as though he had brought no care, while standing together by his couch, hands clasped together, heads bowed, the parents pray in the bitterness of their woe, asking of their God night after night before they lie down to their rest, why this visitation had come, what was the fearful sin they had committed, or what possible atonement could be found which would pacify the angry Ruler of the eternal heavens. The question may often have been suggested down in their hearts, whether it was possible that the child in some former state of spiritual existence had been guilty of the crime for which he was now to suffer a lifetime of darkness, or whether it was consistent with David's description of the God of mercy and loving kindness that this child should suffer for the sins of his parents if they only were guilty? But their petitions and yearnings ascended to the brazen heavens. A deathlike silence was their only reply.

Sometimes, it may be, the father half resolves to curse God and die, and if when together, in that irresistible love for each other in which they seem to be defying God, they attempt to repeat the Twenty-third Psalm, their voices break with the first verse, for they have no Shepherd to praise—only an indefinable sense of guilt in which they feel like the shepherdless goats, when the water springs are dry and the green pastures have changed to a desert.

Yet they cling to their child, and the searching of their hearts would doubtless show that they love him the better because of their great affliction. In spite of their self-condemnation and the fear of God's wrath, they cared for him still more affectionately and rejoiced more sincerely in the sound of his voice.

The real God of love in their heart of hearts asserted his divine power, and overcame the humanly conceived God whom they strenuously sought outwardly to worship.

If the truth were stated, they really loved little Bo beyond all their other children. When he was seven years of age, they would not have parted with him for all the gold of Ophir, or all the magnificence of Solomon. Little Bo became more and more a mystery to his parents and neighbors as the years went on, and there came no providential revelation to show why this curse rested upon that particular family. The parents were meek, resigned, and religious, although their lives were sombre and silent. And the little blind boy himself seems to have followed with loving fidelity the teachings of his parents and the worship of his people.

When he was twelve years of age, he was led to the temple, and he may himself have heard the voice of that wonderful Boy discussing with the doctors great questions of law. He may have stood near that strange Youth through the ceremony of their official recognition ; and he may have listened to the anxious inquiries of Mary, when she returned from her homeward journey to find her son Jesus, who had so unaccountably lingered in the temple.

But the two boys were nothing to each other ; so far as man

could see, they had nothing in common but humanity. They were not even acquaintances. One lived in the far-off Nazareth and the other in the populous city. One had a keen, bright eye, beneath whose look even an apostle would cower and weep ; the other dwelt in perpetual darkness, had never seen the face of his patient father, nor the hand of his affectionate mother. Nothing was alike in their circumstances except the nearly equal dates of their birth.



II.

THE BEGGAR.

THERE were riots in Jerusalem, repeated conflicts between the Jewish and Roman soldiery. The desecration of the temple and the conflicts of Roman and Jewish law had disturbed all kinds of trade, discouraged the employment of labor, and covered the hillsides with graves.

Pilate had come with his picked legion, and quartered it in the tower of Antonia, adding a heavy burden to the already overtaxed people. Many rich men became poor, while many families sought uncertain relief in exile. The grasp of poverty upon the family of little Bo grew tighter and tighter, and at last became relentless. Hunger was often keenly felt, but his father and mother could not move away from Jerusalem. Even if they had an opportunity for themselves, they would not be allowed to travel possibly, unless they abandoned to starvation their sightless boy.

He could not look upon the sacred page of the Holy Law, and hence, because of the superstitious interpretation of the Pharisees, was excluded from the formal and charitable privileges of the poor in the Jewish Church. Had there been any occupation in which he could engage, few employers could be found, for they feared they would become partakers of his hidden sin.



HE WENT HIS WAY THEREFORE.

So little Bo became a beggar. As I picture him to myself to-day he does not seem to have grown in stature with the passing years like the children of his neighbors, who could exercise their bodies in labor or play, but remained a half-grown boy, even after he became of age. To his mother and father he was only a boy, whatever his appearance to others. To them, in his helpless condition, he was a mere child. Led about by them, fed by them, entertained by them, dressed by them, and receiving all his information concerning earth and heaven from the small talk of his mother, or what he heard in the discussion of his father with the poor neighbors or visiting relations.

He appears to me to have been small in stature, pale, thin, and bent, rolling his sightless eyes about in a meaningless way, his long hair falling upon his shoulders, dressed in the cheapest material, with a coarse cord for a belt, barefooted, and carrying a cane; having an acuteness of hearing made doubly so by the continuous exercise of one sense to make up for the loss of another, and recognizing the hands and faces of friends, the street and locality in the city, by a marvelously developed power of touch.

All good men looked on him with pity, and yet approached him with dread whenever they learned that he was born blind. There was nothing in Jerusalem that the poor afflicted boy could do but beg. It would seem as though the hearts of his parents would have grown stony through the multiplied misfortunes of life, and that they must have felt at times that even the Almighty was unkind, when reduced to such extreme poverty that they were obliged to expose

both their loved and afflicted boy, and their own curse, to the view of the careless and scornful public.

Yet, I cannot believe that even when this last stroke came, and they were compelled for their very existence to set him upon the street corner to beg alms from the passers-by, that they completely lost their faith in God. I feel sure that the mother still prayed on, believing that somehow, by some means beyond the power of human beings to understand, God did intend to bring them joy ; yet she trembled lest the curse should be removed by the sudden death of their son.

I often see that mother in my imagination leading her son out of the narrow alley in which their home is situated, and tenderly protecting him through the crowded streets until she finds him a secure place near the corner of the thoroughfares where he will not be crushed by the burdened animals, nor run over by the heartless crowd. The father is away seeking employment in the vineyards down the valley, or in the olive orchards on the hills. The brothers, if he had any, are scattered in various occupations to earn a meagre subsistence ; and, hence, the mother returns to her home, and passes the day alone in sad meditation or in tearful prayer. Her hair has become almost white, her face prematurely wrinkled, her form bowed, and her step unsteady under the combined weight of sorrow and labor through many years.

I see her with head enwrapped after the Eastern manner, hastening often to the corner of the street to make sure by a glance that no misfortune had befallen her blind boy. Never is the care of him

absent from her mind save when she is sure he is sleeping at night. She must have often stood within hearing when the wicked boys of the city would make sport of her son's misfortune, making him the target of their missiles, or the subject of their rude jokes. She must have heard passing merchants cursing him for his impertinence, as he requested a gift, and the Pharisees bitterly discussing the question whether he was blind because of his own sin, or because of the vice or wickedness of his parents. These things were hard for the boy to bear, and added greatly to the pangs of his misfortune; but how much deeper that sword pierced the heart of his mother no person can ever realize.

Day after day he sat at the same corner, extending the same thin and trembling hand, and in the same voice piteously asking for assistance until he was recognized as part of the locality, a fixture in the landscape. "In the name of the Father, alms! alms!"

Yet human life in all grades has its victories as well as its defeats, and a certain meed of pleasure is set in contrast with the deepest losses. If no one noticed the beggar boy, giving him no word of greeting, placing in his open palm no gift through the long, monotonous day of waiting, life seemed to have lost its cheer, and he was led home fatigued; discouraged, and silent. If on some unusual occasion some tender-hearted merchant passed, and from his abundance imparted a liberal gift in the name of his God, it was received with earnest thanksgiving, both to the giver and to God. The journey homeward on such a day was like a triumphal march, and the rest of that night was sweetly filled with peaceful dreams.

To him the receipt of a piece of real silver was the achievement of as great a success as would be the capture of Acre to Alexander the Great. The human heart can feel only a limited degree of joy or sorrow, and there are extremes beyond which it can never pass. When the cup is full it can receive no more, whether it be filled by the meagre success of a beggar, or by the mighty victories of an emperor. Different men and women may feel the same thrill of joy or exultation, caused by events as widely different as the speaking of a kind word, or the gift of a nation's crown. Neither happiness nor sorrow can be measured by social or political position, nor estimated by the figures of finance. But it is difficult for us blessed with sight to conceive how much of satisfaction or of brightness could have come into a life like that of little Bo, so cut off from social companionship, and so continuously reminded of his awful disgrace.

The street on which he sat and begged seems to have been one of the business thoroughfares of the city of Jerusalem, or it may have been the principal highway leading from one of the chief gates up to the temple; for it is certain that the worshipers who came from far-off Galilee frequently passed the spot and became familiar with his form. Visitors from distant Capernaum, Cana, and Nazareth witnessed his sad plight, whether they assisted him or not, and discussed the theological question of his responsibility for sin long after they reached their homes.

His pitiable condition appealed to the hearts of men, and aroused within them a sense of loving pity, which seems strangely inconsistent with their religious creeds and theories. In their view of the situa-



A MAN CALLED JESUS SAID, GO.

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tion, the boy was suffering for some terrible sin of his parents—the innocent for the guilty. Their brains assented to a theory which their hearts would not accept. If they had believed that it was right for him to suffer, they would never have undertaken to relieve his needs. If they had been fully persuaded that he was the object of a righteous curse, they would have deemed his sufferings just, and felt that it was wrong to palliate them.

The brains and hearts of men are often in opposition to each other, but it is usually the brain that is wrong. Wherever the conclusions of the mind are found in opposition to the natural tendencies of a pure heart, it is always seen that the intellect has formed its conclusions upon very meagre or false testimony.

Their brains said that little Bo was the subject of some just anathema ; their hearts said he was a pitiable creature, deserving of the tenderest care and a generous support.

Yet the years passed, and his condition did not change. His face was familiar to visitors from all known parts of the world. More and more the shame of his parents, and farther and farther his sin and sufferings were proclaimed as men came to this great religious centre of the world to worship—from Spain, Rome, Macedonia, Pontus, Silicia, Assyria, Egypt, Asia Minor, Arabia, and Parthia.

It would seem as if any careful observer of the links of events in the life of this boy would have seen that he was being pressed farther and farther, on and on, by one misfortune after another, as a most prominent object lesson of the inconsistent creed of the Jewish Church.

Greek and Barbarian, Jew and Gentile, slave and master, men, women, and children, by the thousand, had seen his face and heard his piteous appeal, and wondered at the providence of God, and inwardly rebelled at the harsh creed which so misrepresented our Heavenly Father. But the sentiment had become crystallized in the forms of the church and in the legislation of the land until there seemed to be but little hope of any reform.

But the Lord had a great use for little Bo ; the Almighty Father had been treating him in the tenderest way. So different are his ways from human ways, that what seems to us harshness, was to him the sublimest exhibition of divine kindness.

Many a man, enjoying fully all his success, surrounded by the luxuries of wealth, and cultivated in the highest forms of learning, inheriting also from his parents social and political positions of honor and power, would have been in the end glad to exchange with little Bo. For real good is not to be judged by its appearance. Only the long result of time can make plain what is really good. Meanwhile we must trust that all is good to them who will have it so.

God makes no mistakes. He is never unkind. He loves the blind man as much as he loves him who can see. He uses the blind for his purposes as fully and as kindly as he uses any other of his creatures. They are sinners only as all other men are sinners, and the instincts God put in the soul of man teach this irresistibly.

The most learned rabbi whose fringed apparel swept the streets of Jerusalem, and the greatest warrior, Greek or Roman, whose

arms have scaled its walls, could not boast of so great usefulness to the world, nor of so great effect upon the affairs of civilization, as could little Bo, had he possessed the gift of prophecy. He had reached, however, the extreme of human degradation, and went about in rags, friendless and disgraced ! Poorest of the poor, weakest of the weak, saddest of the sad !



III.

THE DAWN.

IT is always the darkest just before day. The atmosphere is ever the most oppressive just before the rain. It is so also with spiritual things.

Little Bo's experience was no exception. He went to his accustomed corner on that eventful day, with the same dull, dreary sensations that had characterized his journeys thither through the preceding years.

Whether any premonitions of coming things visited his heart, we cannot tell. Whether a single ray of hope was left in his mother's mind as she left him that morning to return to the dull drudgery of her household labors, the angels in heaven only know. Whether anything unusual marked the departure of his father on that day to his labors, or any especial hope expressed itself in the eye or voice of sister or brother, it may not be necessary for us to know. Such has sometimes been the case in the history of important events. Their star, or their shadow, goes before them.

“ Though dark and despairing, my sight I may seal,
Yet man cannot cover what God would reveal.”

But we suppose he seated himself on the pavement under the overhanging windows, near the point where the narrow alley enters



AND I WENT AND WASHED AND I RECEIVED SIGHT.

the principal street, with the expectation only of another long, dreary day, which should bring him a day's march nearer the welcome grave. His mother, with woman's intuitively prophetic nature, at home thinking constantly of her unfortunate son, must have frequently paused amid the busy labors of the morning, and petitioned high heaven to protect him from the dangers of the street, and prosper his appeal for alms. But no well-defined expectation of a greater blessing, which God had been through the years preparing for them, could have ever entered her heart.

It was morning in nature. The sun rose gloriously over the mountains of Moab, and gleamed upon pinnacle and tower and dome, making the green fields of Olivet rejoice, and imparting life to shrub and tree and grain. But it brought no illumination to the household life of this afflicted family. Nature had destroyed for them her charm; life had lost its zest, beauty, and interest for them. The day of hope seemed to be passed, and their only joy was negative and consisted in lack of feeling. Their greatest ambition was to be insensible.

But God had not forgotten them. The great Father had tempered the winds of Galilee, had driven the fish to deeper waters, had adjusted the storm to his purposes, and had suggested to the minds of many men and women to do a certain thing or visit a definite place, each person and thing in his and its own minor sphere carrying out the great plan of his Maker, who had set a day in which to bless little Bo.

Little did the sick child at Bethesda who detained the apostles

with his cries for comfort, little did the Pharisee who interrupted the journey of the pilgrims toward Jerusalem with his philosophical discussions concerning God's sovereignty, and little did the burden-bearers at the ford of the Jordan, as they stumbled over unseen stones which compelled them to retrace their steps in provoking delay, know how the great machinery of the universe had used all their accidents and actions to bring together in exact adjustment, at a precise time, the event which should bless millions, and especially enrich little Bo.

The men and women who passed the beggar that morning and looked with sympathy or scorn upon his uplifted face had but little conception of the mighty forces which quietly and with divine exactness were working out a plan for his redemption from disgrace, from blindness, from spiritual death. They would have smiled at the suggestion that an Almighty Power would be influenced by the prayers of a poor, ignorant woman like his mother, or that he would be inclined to change any of his ongoing methods to accommodate a poor beggar so friendless as Bo.

But thou
Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain
To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn ;
So thick a drop serene hath quenched their orbs,
Or dim suffusion veiled.

. Thus with the year
Seasons return, but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine ;

But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men
Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair
Presented with a blank
Of nature's works, to me expunged and razed,
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.

But it only required that God should think of him ; that all the powers in heaven and earth, in nature animate and inanimate, should set themselves at work with cheerful obedience to accomplish the wish of that spiritual Power in whom we live and move and have our being.

Christ is coming ! And with his appearance would appear great changes. But no human soul could possibly foresee just what these changes would be. Yes, Christ was coming ! All nature in Galilee, Perea, Jericho, and Judea had hindered or hastened his footsteps until, at the exact moment desired of God, he entered the gate of Jerusalem.

Christ was coming ! Although little Bo could not appreciate it, yet his own footsteps had been directed with the same kind precision to the corner of the street that morning, and the passing wayfarers had one after another refused his petitions, in order that at a certain exact moment he should hold out his hand and cry with unusual fervor for the pittance so many had denied. All the evil of wicked men was overruled and used for good, all the deeds of the righteous were inspired for a godly end.

Christ was coming ! And the evening shadows of that long day would be brighter to Bo than the gleaming of the morning sun.

And the contrast suggested by these words is small, compared with the contrast in his condition following the coming of Christ. Upon his long night of mourning rejoicing should arise, and upon him who had these long years sat in bondage the light should dawn.

Yes, Christ was coming ! How much that means to-day ; how much it meant then to that blind beggar. To-day all the bitterness of keen disgrace ; to-morrow all the pride of innocence and strength. To-day the world is in darkness ; to-morrow every tower, palace, field, garden, mountain, and cloud will stand out a most lovely panorama before his astonished vision. To-day no friends ; to-morrow the whole public his admirers. To-day neglected and scorned ; to-morrow the object of universal respect and curiosity. To-day his mother's sighs fill the humble home with the ghosts of hopes long since dead ; to-morrow angel faces will smile from every shadow with benedictions of peace. To-day the mother's tears are dark as drops of gall ; to-morrow the rainbow will illuminate every glistening one. To-day the father's work is dull, lifeless, and pain-giving ; to-morrow any occupation will be light, easy, and accompanied with thanksgiving. To-day, probably, the brother and sister speak of Bo in low tones, under their breath, as though they feared detection ; to-morrow this same brother will be an object of pride, and their reference to him will be made with exultation as if he had won a victory. To-day the neighbors shun the threshold which his steps have cursed, and bid their children avoid his shadow ; to-morrow they will crowd his home with congratulations, and mention with self-satisfaction that they have been his acquaintances all his life.



HE WENT—AND CAME SEEING.

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Christ is coming ! To-day the church dignitaries in pride and bigotry regard themselves as especially favored of God, and thank the Almighty that they are not as blind men. They claim for themselves a special sanctity and regard it as a proof of their nearness to God that they are not afflicted with sightless eyes. To-morrow their theories will seem so inadequate, and their self-satisfaction so unfounded, that they will find themselves sinners above all other men. Christ is coming ! They of low degree will be exalted ; the cast-down will be lifted up ; the weak will be made strong ; the poor will be made rich ; the sorrowful will be filled with joy ; the innocent will be honored and the guilty punished ; devils will flee ; angels will come in.

All the morning the hastening crowd have been passing the poor blind boy. Sometimes the heavy tramp of laden animals was on the pavement ; at other times the patter of childish feet ; at others still, the irregular clatter of the water-carrier's sandals, with shorter or longer intervals between the cursing of the drivers, the laughter of the children, the cheerful greetings of acquaintances.

Again and again he stretched out his hand as some person seemed to be passing near, repeating the much-worn cry : " Help thy brother, in the name of God." All the languages of the known world were represented by the people who passed, and all degrees of cultivation and feeling were expressed in the modulation of their voices.

He had become so accustomed to the place and the great variety of sounds that he could detect the nationalities of the speakers,

their business, and often their success, in the short interval which they required to pass the alley in which he sat. Soon he heard the peculiar accents of Galilee, as there drew near to his corner a company of men, whose heavy footfalls showed him they were men of middle age, of vigorous physical life, firm in their moral convictions, independent in all their ways. How much there is in a footfall to a blind man ! They who enjoy their sight can never appreciate how much expression there is in the tone of the voice, in the dialect, in the use of words, and in the footfall. Only he who sits in darkness can accurately understand that.

He heard the Galileans coming, and expected from their generous race his usual liberal gift ; but they were deeply interested in the discussion of some religious question, which led him to fear they would not give him a passing notice. Still arguing almost angrily some ceremonial matter in which he did not dream he could have any personal interest, they reached his corner. They are passing him. He reaches out and calls : " Help thy brother, in the name of God." But they pass by. The hope of a gift from them is gone. They are evidently Rabbis and Pharisees, more interested in the discussion of abstruse questions than in the practical assistance of their fellow-men.

But to little Bo's surprise, the small procession mysteriously stops at the other corner. He hears one, with a strong voice and very quick utterance, calling attention to his blindness. He can hear the moving of feet as the interested company turns about, and intuitively feels that a score of eyes are turned directly upon his

upraised face. He does not understand what the unusual movement means, and is convinced that it has no charitable object. Then he hears the same strong voice, in marked Galilean accent, asking in a tone surcharged with irony : "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind ? "

That is a question of vital importance to the blind boy. Quickly comes the answer. But how different the voice of the speaker. How full of tenderness, and yet how decided ! The expression of this voice was sweet as the sound of distant bells, yet clear and imperative as the call of a trumpet. There was a tenderness about it that made the beggar's heart thrill, and awoke within him the deepest emotions of affectionate regard.

"Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents, that he was born blind, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him." The answer was uttered in such a tone as to preclude any reply, and place the assertion beyond discussion. This man was not born blind because of any sin of his own, nor because of any sin of his parents. He was born blind because in that condition he could best serve the Lord in promoting the welfare of man and heightening the glory of heaven.

Oh, what an assurance was that to little Bo. What inexpressible comfort to his poor heart. No such sympathy had he ever heard expressed before. Indeed, the Comforter had come. The stranger had uttered just what he had felt throughout his life ; had boldly uttered a truth which his own conscience and experience most completely approved. Not that he was sinless himself, but

that this great affliction had been permitted of God to work out some great good which could not otherwise have been accomplished. He feels contented now to be blind, now that the reasoner had filled his heart with the hope that what he suffers may be for the best service of his God ; that even his life may be as useful after all in the hands of God as the lives of the great and wealthy. Life's hope swiftly returns the bitter waters that have been sweetened. He thinks he will be content even in his beggary, and even with disgrace, since there is at last one whose tones show him to be so compassionate and pure, who believes in his innocence.

There stand Jesus and his apostles about the corner of that street. You and I could see them with our priceless eyesight, but Bo sat in darkness wondering.

We can see the excitable but stalwart form of Peter as he points to the blind boy on the pavement, and presents to Jesus the creed of the Jewish Church concerning the curse of blindness, and asks if such things can be so. Jesus' own beauty of feature, grace of movement, purity of thought, kindness of heart, and compassion to the poor, as the Son of God, seemed so inconsistent with the interpretations of the Pharisees, that impulsive Peter, without waiting to consider his words, almost triumphantly accuses his God of inconsistency. Who did sin ?

Poor Bo reasonably expects a theological quarrel in which he will be neglected and forgotten, and fears because of sad experience that these religious devotees will go on in their theological discussions only to be enemies of each other and oblivious of him. But



SOME SAID, THIS IS HE.

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he detects a quick movement of soft footsteps. The man of tender tones draws near to him ; and his confident action convinces even the blind man that he is a master workman in whatever he is about to undertake. There is no tremor of indecision, no haste, but the gliding movement of one who understands fully his situation. His demeanor seems to say in language stronger than words, this is no time to discuss technical questions of the law. I have no spare moments for argument upon your criticism of the church, or of its interpretation of God's word. While in the same decisive tones, so full of divine spirit of kindness, he says : "I must work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work." The works of God shall now be made manifest in the blind boy.

We can see Jesus hastily removing his cloak. We can see him pass it quickly to the beloved disciple John. We can see him as the little knots of Galileans gather around with curious expression, as he places his hand upon Bo's head. He strokes back his long hair. He bids him open wide his eyes.

Poor Bo ! Be patient now, for this is the last and severest test of your faith, the last pang of a long travail of years of grief ! What, could not the Son of God relieve this poor beggar without additional pain ? It would seem that other suffering was necessary, or it would not have followed, for God afflicts none willingly, and would not that any should perish, but rather that all should come unto him and live.

Curiosity changes into astonishment as the disciples see their divine Master spit into the dust of the street, and take it up as thus

moistened, and press it into each of the open eyes of the blind man. The acute pain which followed that application must have caused the poor boy to cry out and add his screams to the expressions of angry astonishment on the part of those who looked wonderingly on. Sand and dust in the eyes of the blind ! Of what medical use could such a prescription be ! Ah, when the science of medicine shall have reached its triumphant victory, and wise men shall understand this complicated machine of the body, so wonderfully and fearfully made, it will be found that there is an element in the relation of the mind and body which has not been fathomed yet. When the purpose of medicine shall be complete, doctors will find that the science of chemistry is only one-half of a physician's accomplishments ; for man is dual, mind and body, and all diseases affect both.

It was necessary, in accordance with natural law, for the recovery of this boy's sight, that he should have faith in his physician. He could not see. It was necessary that he should be certain that something was being done for his relief. Faith must be awakened, or even Christ cannot save. Many patients need to clearly feel the burning of a prescription, or distinctly realize the strength of medicine, or they will not believe it to be efficacious. Such is peculiarly the failing of the blind.

The moistened dust from the street did not in itself contain, so far as we can know, any medicinal power ; but the pain which it caused in connection with the most sensitive nerves of the human body, aroused in the heart of the blind boy a clear sense of feeling, the conviction that something powerful was being done for his eyes.

In proportion to his lack of faith did the sand burn and smart upon his eyeballs, until an over-mastering desire to wash his eyes free from the obstructions led him to cry out for water.

That the person who was administering to him evidently intended to bring sight to his eyes became clear to the boy, and a full conviction that the physician was able to accomplish the task, took possession of his mind. His faith was complete.

All the violent changes from darkness to light, from disgrace to admiration, from hatred to love, when Christ first appears to the soul, are always accompanied with pain ; but all this is evidence that Christ has come, and come to establish a necessary faith for salvation.

Poor Bo moans in pain. He rocks to and fro. He presses his palms to his sightless eyes and seems to be utterly wretched. He seemed the object of most cruel treatment, and the wonder of those who witnessed it. But the Saviour takes his hand, lifts him quickly to his feet, places his old cane in his hands, and bidding the disciples stand back from the narrow street, commands Bo, in tones of unmistakable authority, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam."

The wretched boy thought not of disobedience to the command, never questioned the right of his seeming tormentor to do as he had done. Excited, he seizes the staff with trembling hand, and takes a few steps down the street. Can he not have some friend to show him through the narrow streets and crowded marts, and through the over-filled gateway? Could he not wait for his mother, who would soon come in her usual round to bring him his humble

dinner ; or was there not some fountain near by where he could more quickly wash from his eyes the painful atoms? No! The distant pool of Siloam in the valley, difficult and dangerous of access, was the unmodified command. There is something for you to do in your restoration. Faith without works is dead. You believe you are to be restored. You have received the divine prescription. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam."





THEY BROUGHT TO THE PHARISEES HIM THAT WAS BLIND.

IV.

TO THE POOL OF SILOAM.

LIFE is measured not by days and years, but by experience. "He lives most who thinks most." And he lives longest who passes through the greatest number of important events.

To the idlers in the gate of Jerusalem any hour of that day would have passed uncounted and unmeasured ; to the busy merchant or the gossip on the housetop, the hour seemed very short ; but to little Bo that short space of time which followed his remarkable interview with Jesus, when he picked his difficult way out of the city, was undoubtedly the longest hour of all his life. Impelled by a double influence, seeking relief from pain, and elated with hope of a boon which cannot be compared with riches, he hastened toward the gate.

Oh, if any one of us were to have a proposition seriously presented to purchase our eyesight, compelling us to place an estimate upon the proper equivalent for the loss of our eyes, our meditation then would give us a better appreciation of their value.

It requires no unusual imagination to see the bent form, with short and nervous steps, holding the staff in advance with a trembling hand, hurrying along the narrow and crowded street which led to the Sheep gate. Often he is suddenly obstructed by a has-

tening pedestrian ; often he is obliged to wait through long and painful minutes for the passage of a loaded camel ; often he gets confused, and calls out as he hears approaching footsteps : “ Hear ! hear ! I am blind ! show me the way to the gate.” Curious people who had often noticed him as he sat and begged, filled with surprise at his anxious movement, would ask him, “ Whither are you hastening ? What has happened ? ”

“ To the pool of Siloam, to the pool of Siloam ; for the love of God, hinder me not ! ”

Perhaps in his inconsiderate haste and wild demeanor he aroused the superstitious fears of many travelers, who touched their foreheads and looked after him, as much as to say, “ He is not only blind, but possessed of a demon.” But those smarting eyes, that profound hope, made him regardless of danger in any shape. His heart was intent upon one thing only—the waters of Siloam.

If any official stopped him at the gate in his singular course, and asked him why he sought so eagerly the path to Siloam, he would only answer : “ He told me ‘ Go wash in the pool of Siloam.’ ” If they asked him who it was that gave him such commands, his confusion was complete, for he had trusted to the sound of a voice, and to the strange but silent influence of the man who had spoken as one having authority. “ I know not who he is, I know not where he is, but I do know that he bade me wash in the pool of Siloam, and I expect there to receive my sight.”

Once outside the gate, in the air of the fresh and open fields, his pathway was still more difficult, for the way led down the rocky de-

clivities in zigzag courses into the deep valley below the embattlements of the southeastern wall.

We see him rapping with his cane against the rocks, pushing the end of that staff into the pathway, taking venturesome leaps to save a long detour. He often slips upon the shelving rocks, and sometimes meets with heavy falls. Soon his preternatural sense of hearing brings him the sound of softly rippling water.

Laughing rivulets, gleaming fountains, quiet rivers, and rolling ocean have often received the encomiums of the wise and the good; but no sound of water in all the realm of nature could possibly bring to a person a more important or more delightful message than the voice of the fountain which flowed into the pool of Siloam brought that day to little Bo.

In the ancient days, when methods of hydraulic engineering, now lost to the science, could tunnel the mighty ledge of rock on which Jerusalem stood, and bring far distant fountains by secret passages into the pools of the city, the aqueduct which led to this marvelous pool was made, and none knew for what God would use it.

The peasants, laboring in the terraced gardens, the crowd of water-carriers, obstructing the space descending into the pool, were doubtless startled at the apparition-like appearance of the excited blind boy. They may have attempted to stop him, or may, in fear, have suddenly given him passage-way; but it must have been an astonishing sight to them. To him it was an experience too exciting to remember. Overwhelmed with one idea, like a soldier

excitedly joining in the awful charge of battle, or like a racer which, as it nears the goal, ventures all its strength and life upon the last home-stretch, so he must have rushed toward the sound of the singing waters with an impetuosity that nothing was able to resist.

Perhaps he went not in the usual manner into the pool, but when he reached the last one of the flight of steps in the wall enclosing the deep waters, he leaped, with his staff still in his hand, into the silent depths. He had trusted Christ and ventured his all in obedience to the divine command. He who ventures all, there finds all. He who ventures little, may lose all.

I see the boy rising from the pool, as hastily the people gather around, horror-stricken at what they supposed to be a suicide. I see the retreating ripples of the disturbed waters as he excitedly beats about him, fighting now a battle with death itself. I see him as he reaches upward to take the hands stretched out to save him. I see him rudely drawn from the waters and laid upon the ground. I see him rub his eyes, lift the eyelashes, and hear his excited shouts: "I can see! I can see!"

Plied with a thousand questions, eagerly examined by curious bystanders, strenuously denying that he had any intention of committing suicide, he exclaims: "I am blind Bo, the beggar; but now I can see! I can see!"

"Hail, holy light! offspring of heaven's firstborn!
Or of the Eternal co-eternal beam,
May I express thee unblamed? since God is light,
And never but in unapproached light



THEY CALLED THE PARENTS OF HIM.

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Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.
Or hear'st thou rather pure ethereal stream,
Whose fountain who shall tell? Before the sun,
Before the Heavens thou wert; and at the voice
Of God, as with a mantle, didst invest
The rising world of waters dark and deep,
Won from the void and formless infinite."

Yet he knew not then how to use his sight; knew not how to interpret the strange impressions. All things seemed to be reversed to his eyesight as compared with the impressions they had made upon his sense of touch.

The excited crowd gathered about him, every one eager to assist him, all trying by every variety of expression to teach him the use of his suddenly attained eyesight. But he demands his cane again; he feels the path and touches the rock. He touches the faces of men with his fingers; he sits down and rises up in strange bewilderment, finding himself as one who had dropped from another sphere into this ready-made, wonderful, and beautiful world. To see the mountains, the valleys, the fields, and trees, and sky, and clouds, and sun, and walls, and forms of men, and faces of friends for the first time was like a painfully happy dream. "He went and washed, and came seeing." He went down friendless and alone, for he was blind and poor; he returned accompanied by an excited retinue, for he can see, and evidently had powerful friends.

But his chief thought is of home. It is with great impatience that

he delays to answer the eager questions of those who met him as he was returning, because of his great anxiety to tell his good fortune to his mother, and lift the burden of years from her heart by telling her that the horrid curse is removed.

Transfer yourself now to that little home in that dark alley, where all through the afternoon of that day the mother has been engaged alone in the rude housework of that age, preparing a simple meal for her blind son, and arranging for the supper to which her tired husband would come at sunset. Some have thought that it was the usual custom of a mother or sister to carry a luncheon to her invalid relative who begged upon the highways, and that his mother must have taken such a package to little Bo that day; and that she must have been greatly surprised and disheartened at his unusual absence from his place. But it is almost unreasonable to suppose that she harbored that day all the gloomy feelings of the days past, or that even his unaccountable departure from his usual seat filled her with dismay. For there is in the heart of womanhood, as I have said, especially developed in motherhood, an intuitive monition, which, like a prophet's voice, gives silent but impressive warning of the approach of calamity, or of great joy, to one so near as its own offspring.

We have often wished that we had that mother's account of her own experience and feelings that day, as she went through the ordinary routine of her duties, still pondering upon the strange providence of God, and still questioning why they had been so grievously afflicted with a blind son. The hopes and ambitions of youthful days

had largely departed. The end of life was drawing nearer, and she had become more and more conscious of the shortness of earth's journey, and how small a matter were earth's small trials compared with the eternities of God. I should like to hear her story describing how she felt that same afternoon when the neighbors passed and repassed her door without recognition, and as she was reminded again and again of the fact that her life was under a ban, and there were none so poor as to do her reverence. Yet, for some unseen reason her tears were less copious, and her sighs less deep, notwithstanding there appeared to be no outward change.

But now, there was a sudden noise in the street: The sound of hastening feet and a babel of mingled and excited voices, with a rush as of an excited mob. The startled mother turns from her work toward the door. They have reached the corner now. The shoutings and cries increase. They rush like an angry flood down the alley; amid the many voices that mother recognizes the voice of her son. Quickly she steps to the door, to be met at the very threshold by little Bo, who frightens her by the suddenness of his leap and the reckless way in which he throws his arms around her neck, and the nature of his excited tones, as he actually screams: "Mother, I can see! I can see! My eyes are open! Oh, mother, mother! he said that neither I had sinned nor my parents. He who told me to wash in the pool of Siloam declared that I had been born blind for some good purpose of God. And he has opened my eyes. I can see! I can see!" Yet the tears disturbed his vision, and as his mother pushed him from her at arms' length a moment to gaze into his

eyes, he then, for the first time in his life, really saw his mother's face.

Warriors have won great victories and rejoiced unspeakably ; travelers have visited distant countries and returned with safety and joy ; men have sought year after year for great riches and at last have returned with their reward ; ambitious statesmen have labored night and day for some famous position and finally have received the certificate of their election ; women have seen in life a great work fully accomplished and have rejoiced in mighty achievements of good ; but never in the history of men and women's toils and victories could there be a satisfaction so great, so deep, and a joy so sweet as that which filled to overflowing that mother's heart. She would have given her own sight at any time if such a sacrifice would have enabled her son to see ; yes, even her life would have been surrendered as a thing of but small moment if her son and family could have been relieved from their disgrace. But here it is, coming to her as a free gift, coming at the time of all others when least expected ; coming in a way no priest nor Pharisee could possibly have foreseen. She cannot believe. She looks again and again into the clear pupils, and doubts her own vision. She asks him over and over again to give an account of his recovery, and wonders if she is not dreaming. She puts her hands upon his head. She embraces him again and again, that she may have the testimony of touch to confirm the evidence of her own sight and hearing.

How changed is his countenance now that the windows of the soul are open ! Unconscious of the excited crowd of neighbors who



AND THEY CAST HIM OUT.

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press into the alley and press to the threshold, excitedly calling for explanations, mother and son, only conscious of each other's love, stand many minutes unheeding, and weeping upon each other's neck.

"Send some one to tell father!" is the next thought which comes to interrupt their thrill of joy. There are ready volunteers to carry such a message, and swiftly they hasten to the father in the fields, to tell him what he will not believe, and in which he will only have sufficient confidence to understand that something strange has happened, and hurry homeward.

I see him also as he embraces his son, weeping meanwhile. I see him as, with bowed head and reverent tone, he offers up thanksgiving to the Almighty. Oh, lovely home! oh, precious love! oh, rich gift of God! Christ has come though they know him not.

But the unmanageable crowd at the doorway will not longer restrain their great curiosity and excitement. With loud shouts and cries, they demand the privilege of seeing little Bo. And when at last he presents himself at the narrow doorway, and looks out upon them with tears still streaming down his face, his changed appearance leads to excited discussion, and these hasty Eastern people begin a heated argument as to his identity. Some shout, "It is not little Bo, although he looks somewhat like him." Others say, "It is he," while some of the more conservative approach the door and ask of the father: "Is this not he who sat and begged?" Before father or mother or friend can reply, little Bo, realizing fully that it is an acknowledgment of the past darkness, shame, and poverty, yet deter-

mined, in the present blessing of God, to be truthful and brave, declares in loud tones, in the presence of all, "I am he."

Then a shout comes up from the throats of hundreds of people, "If you are he, how did you receive your sight? How were thine eyes opened?" I see him standing on tip-toe on the threshold, with his hand resting against the posts, excitedly explaining to the eager audience in the street the method of his restoration. "He who is called Jesus made clay of the dust of the street, pressed it into my eyes, and bade me go wash in the pool of Siloam; and I went and washed, and received my sight."

His experience as he wandered in pain and darkness to the pool of Siloam, his rejoicings, his difficulties, the strange scenes connected with his anxious journey homeward, he told to friends and enemies alike. Then the shout goes up from the great mass of humanity, "Where is he? where is he? He must be divine. A man who restores sight to one who was born blind, and thus assumes an authority of removing disgrace and sin, thus by action forgiving trespasses against God, must be a divine being. Where is he? Show us the man, that we may do him reverence. Show us the man that he may heal us of our diseases. Show us the man that he may teach us the way to God!" To all of which little Bo was compelled to reply: "I do not know where he is. Of course, I have never seen his form. I have only heard his voice and his footfall. If either were to draw near I should certainly recognize it."

Hour after hour passed. The sun sets, and the evening draws on, and still excited multitudes come and go to see with their own

eyes the subject of such a wonderful miracle. Perhaps little Bo has sufficient intuition of the ways of God to see already in the circumstances which have followed his restoration, that God was using him for his great purposes, and that his blindness has already been of untold use.

While he could not realize the army of many millions of Christians who would read his story throughout the ages and be helped by it, and the uncounted multitudes of sinners who would hear of his healing and be comforted by it, yet in a single afternoon which followed his marvelous experience a good was done which eternity itself can only reveal.

The visitors at his house scattered to their homes, into the assemblies, at the gates, into the market places, into halls, palaces, and the temple, carrying everywhere the news of this great miracle. Soon on every side throughout the city, men and women were heard repeatedly asking each other concerning the Healer: "Where is he? where is he?"



V.

THE COURT ROOM.

AS there is no great loss without some small gain, so there is no great gain without some small loss.

Little Bo had surely received his sight, but the victory was not yet complete. On the day he washed in the pool of Siloam the supreme court of the nation was in session in a great hall near the temple. It was composed of the most distinguished scholars and statesmen of the Israelitish nation, and was called the Sanhedrin. Haughty priests and pious scholars assembled in that hall several times a year to pass upon great questions of State and adjust as far as they could the Jewish laws to the Roman military domination. These judges were without exception fierce opponents to the Roman Government, and the most of them would have gladly sacrificed their lives to secure the permanent independence of the Jews. Yet they were shrewd and cautious, discountenancing any appearance of insurrection, unless they saw in it some strong hope of success.

This court had formerly had the power of sentencing a large class of criminals to death or to severe punishment, but a few years before, the Roman Emperor had by proclamation taken away the right of capital punishment.

These judges were all philosophers, with a lifelong training in the examination of the smallest and most hair-splitting questions



JESUS HEARD THAT THEY HAD CAST HIM OUT.

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connected with the principles and history of religion and the duties of the citizen. So self-opinionated were they, that it was a rare thing for them ever to reach a unanimous decision upon any question brought before them. If any person had been suddenly healed, he was directed by the customs of the times to show himself to the priests that they might have an opportunity of examining into the case and preventing the people from being duped ; and also to gain information for future use. It was a dignified body, before which the highest officers bowed in reverence, and was greatly feared by the criminal classes and by apostates.

That august court was also in session the day after little Bo was restored to sight. It was informed by an excited officer of the court that a poor little beggar had suddenly been restored to sight by the miraculous power of that Galilean,—Jesus by name.

Neither the name nor the person was new to them, as they had often in private, and sometimes in public, discussed the claims of this man to the Messiahship of the Jewish nation. They all believed that his pretensions were either hypocritical or insane, and that any movement at that time in favor of establishing a kingdom for the Jews would only lead to terrible bloodshed, and consequent slavery, because of the weakness of the Jews when compared with the disciplined soldiery of Rome. Some of them were thoroughly convinced that Jesus had performed miracles, but they attributed his power to the influence he had with Satan.

When the news came to them of this important miracle, and they were told how excitedly the people were behaving throughout

the city over this new wonder, the officers of the court were commissioned to bring little Bo to them at once.

Little Bo may have been a sinner in some respects, and may have been weak in others, but this is certain, he was not a coward. It would appear that when the officers came to take him to the Sanhedrin, he obeyed without reluctance, and when brought into the presence of that august body of judges, the highest authority in the nation except the military power of Rome, he did not hesitate to answer plainly and clearly the cross-questionings of those acute lawyers.

He was at first requested to tell his own story upon the witness stand, which he did in a straightforward manner, describing how a person, who was called Jesus, whom, however, he had never seen, came to him as he sat by the wayside, put clay in his eyes, and bade him go wash in the pool of Siloam ; and that when he came forth from the waters of the pool he discovered that he possessed that strange power of sight, of which he had often heard so much and realized so little. Little Bo's father and mother seem to have trembled that their son should be called before the court, and remained at home through the time of his absence filled with anxious fears.

There was a long session of the court that day, and little Bo was closely questioned upon every detail connected with the important circumstances, and answered over and over again the same question in a different form. Several times the astute lawyers tried to entrap him in his speech, asking him leading and misleading

questions, which, however, he was shrewd enough to see and answer as they deserved. Notwithstanding the directness of his replies, and the apparent honesty of the witness, they would not believe that he had been blind until they called his parents.

His parents were greatly dismayed when the officers of the law demanded their presence in the great court, and feared imprisonment, or, what would have been far worse to them, expulsion from the synagogue. They came in tremblingly, and answered hesitatingly. They evaded the questions which were asked, confirming the judges in their preconceived opinion that there was something dishonest or wicked connected with the transaction.

“Is this your son who you say was born blind?” thundered the principal lawyer. To this question they gave a hesitating assent.

“Then how is it that he doth now see?” impudently and sarcastically asks the cross-questioner. To this the mother answered:

“This is our son, who we know was born blind; but by what means he doth now see we know not. He is of age, ask him.”

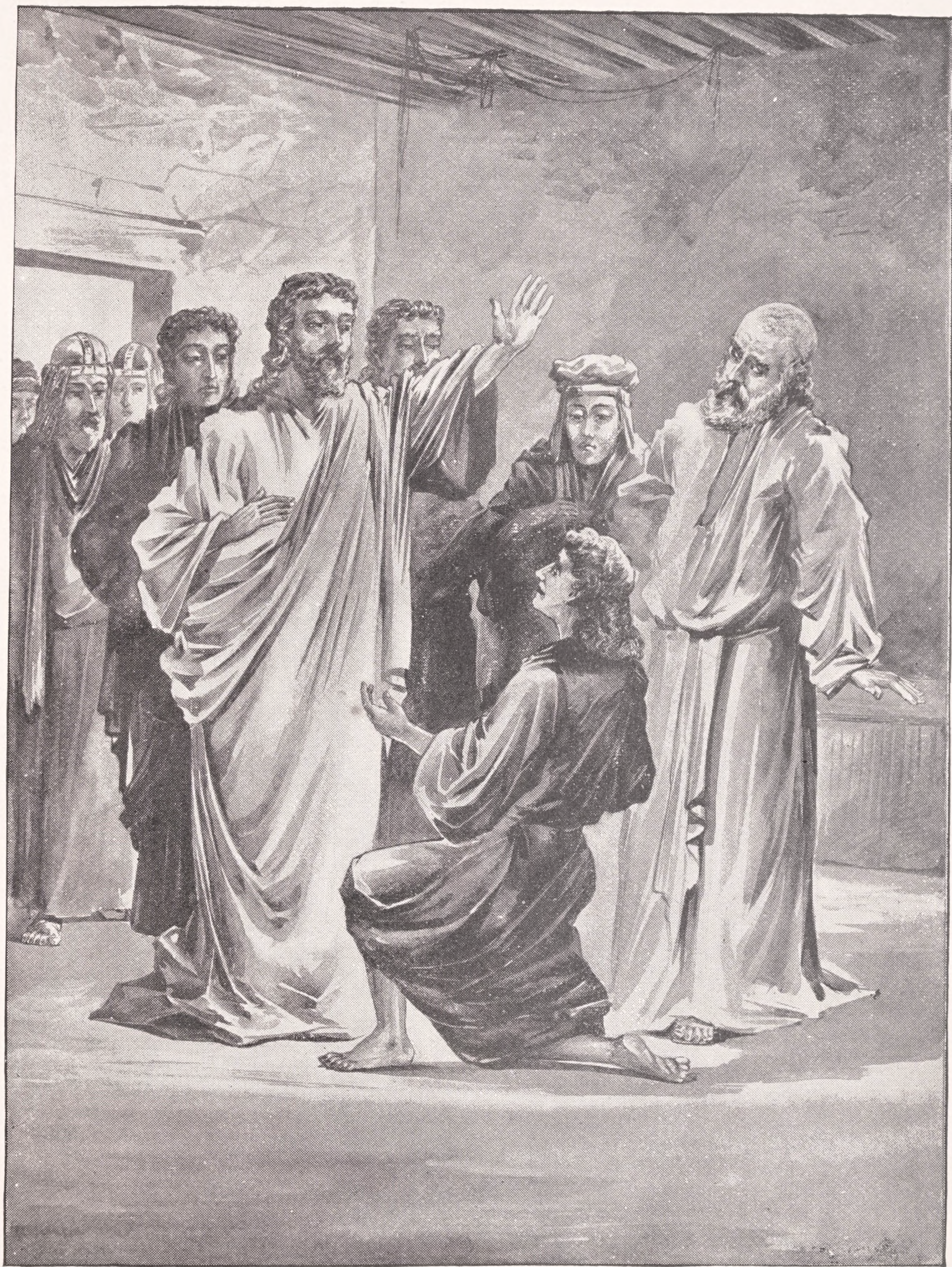
The conviction in the breast of the boy that the power which had so blessed him by giving him sight would not forsake him in this, another extremity, confirmed him in his brave attitude, as he sat at the other end of the hall, to which place he had been sent that he might not hear the testimony of his parents. His determined face, and decidedly upright position, must have led his timid mother to refer the matter to him.

The old folks were poor witnesses, but they adhered to the

truth in the main, though amid the confusion of conflicting questions, they were often misunderstood. They dared not admit that they believed in Jesus, for fear of being turned out of the synagogue. Then the officers were directed to again bring forward little Bo, and he once more stood in front of the judges' bench. Again the presiding judge addressed him, and said with solemn but haughty tone, "Give God the praise ; we have decided that this man Jesus is a sinner." Then the boy,—as I continue to call him,—with a confused sense of insult and injury, replied : " Whether he be a sinner or no I know not. That is not a question for a layman to decide. But this one thing I do know, that whereas I was blind, I now see."

But some of the court were still unsatisfied with his testimony and asked him again : " What did he to thee ? How opened he thine eyes ? " The boy began to lose all patience, and he sharply responded : " I have told you already ; wherefore would you hear it again ? Will ye also be his disciples ? " The look of scorn which at once covered the countenances of the judges was the emblazonry of Satanic hate. Hear them, losing all dignity, hiss down at the boy, " You are his disciple ! But we are Moses' disciples ! We know that God spake unto Moses. As for this fellow, we know not whence he is."

The irony and contempt so bitterly expressed concerning his benefactor, aroused the sleeping giant in the boy's meek life. He could not bear to hear one word of reproach uttered against one who was evidently so near to God, and who had blessed him with his sight. He trembled with indignation and then, bursting forth,



DOST THOU BELIEVE ON THE SON OF GOD?

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the released force of his wrath carried everything before it. He turned and spake aloud in their faces : “ Why, herein is a marvelous thing ; that ye, with all your pretended learning and your bigoted sanctity, ye know not whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. I am not a lawyer nor a theologian ; but I know that since the world began was it not known that any man opened the eyes of one born blind. I have enough common sense to know that God heareth not sinners. But if any man be a worshiper of him, him he heareth. If this man who has opened mine eyes were not of God he could do nothing.”

Both parties are now excited with anger, and the dignified Jewish judges see that the boy has unconsciously held them up to ridicule, and that the officers and spectators will not be likely to forget their discomfiture when other questions shall arise. With all the excitability of the Orientals, they forget everything but their spite and injured pride, and begin to hurl low epithets at the boy, losing all dignity, all sense of justice, delicacy, and honor. They accuse him of being a shame to his mother and a disgrace to his family. They taunted him of having been cursed of God, with being a blind beggar, and hurled at him most cowardly and disgraceful taunts, saying : “ Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us ? ”

The boy tries to talk, but is silenced by the angry judges. In the confusion they angrily command the officers to seize him, and as he is charged with no crime which would give them a standing before the Roman military tribunal should they sentence him to any punish-

ment, they ordered the officers to cast him headlong out into the street. And they drove him out. Then with one acclaim they decided upon his expulsion from the synagogue.

Poor Bo ! Covered with dust, his clothing torn with his rough handling, was raised up by his father and mother and led back with many pauses and halting footsteps to his humble home. There with the crowd shut out, they sat together through the long hours of the night, perhaps talking of the terrible occurrences ; while little Bo himself wished that he had remained blind. Tears flowed freely, and the sighs were deep, as mother and father and son, with perhaps brother and sister, meditated upon the renewed disgrace which had come to their family in his expulsion from the synagogue.

They did not know until after the sentence had been passed, that the judges in the Sanhedrin had agreed already that if any man should say that Jesus was the Christ he should certainly be expelled.

He had broken their command unconsciously, and had declared before them his belief that whoever Jesus might be, "he certainly was a prophet" ; and now the greatest shame that could come to a Jewish family had come in the form of this angry, but awful sentence.

To be expelled from the church ; to be shut out from society ; to be shunned as if he were a servant of Satan, with no hope of social promotion in this life, and with the added claim on the part of the judges that they could shut him out of happiness in the life to come.

Yet he had spoken the truth, and had spoken bravely, and why

in a time like that, such disgrace should be allowed by the providence of God, must have been a greater wonder to the mother than the fact that she had a son at all who was born blind.

Ah, the battle is not over when the soul confesses the Christ who hath opened its eyes. "We cannot go to heaven on flowery beds of ease." God's ways are not our ways, and yet God's ways are always kind.



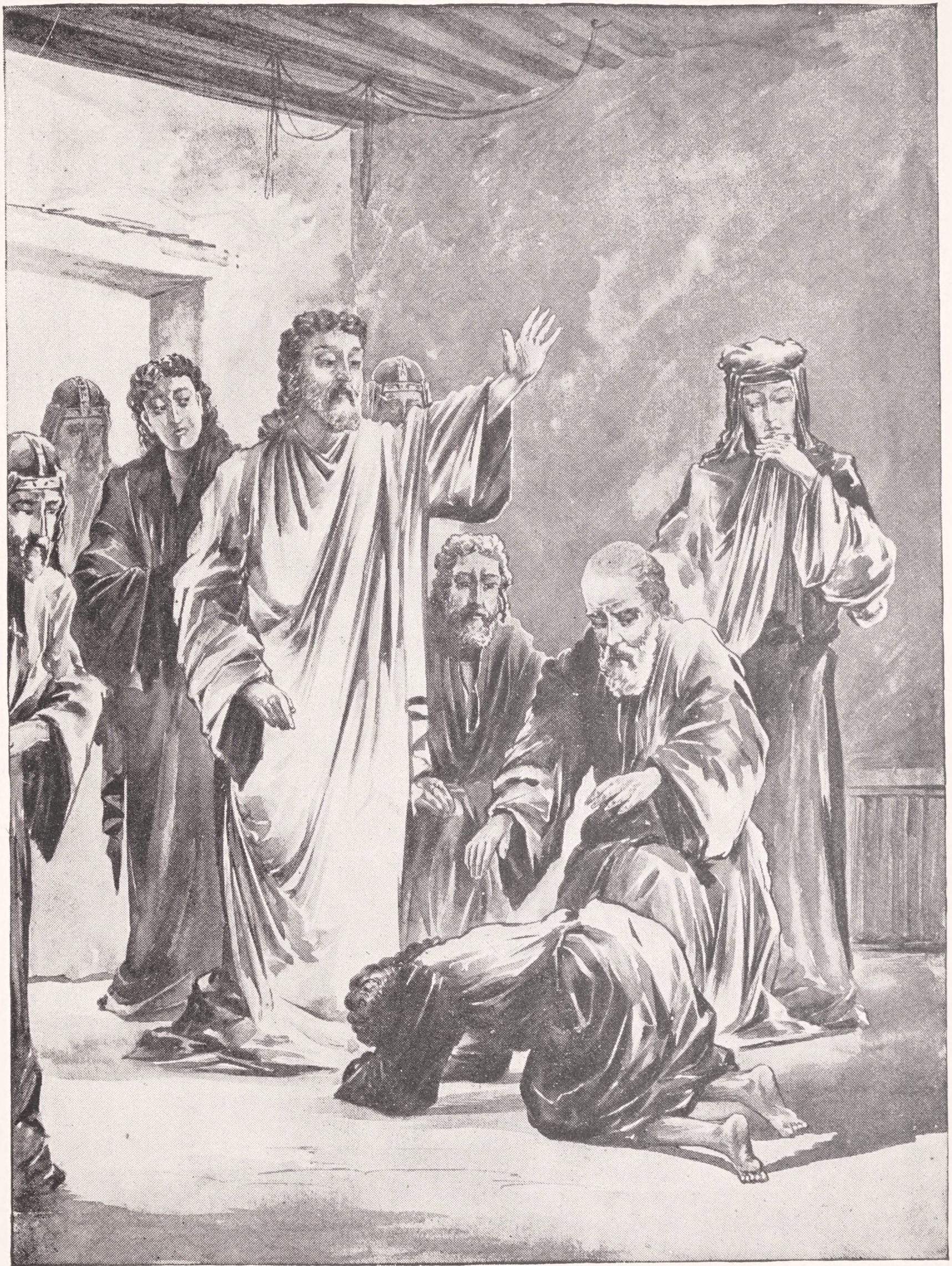
VI.

TRIUMPH.

JESUS heard that they had cast him out. Of course, he did. Who acted as the messenger we do not know. Whether it was Bo's elder sister or his little brother, or some acquaintance, or some angel of God commissioned to care for such as shall be heirs of salvation, we cannot say; yet we often wish that we did know who it was that was mutually acquainted with the poor blind beggar and with Jesus the Christ.

Somehow, Jesus is always certain to hear when any person is unjustly pressed, or when one of his beloved disciples is in grief. It does not take long for the Divine One now to hear from any portion of his great universe, and quicker than thought he answers to the cry of any one of his unduly laden creatures.

Wherever Jesus was at the time the messenger came and told him that little Bo was in disgrace because of the bigoted Pharisees, he turned his footsteps quickly toward that humble door. He approached that sad home. Behold, he stands at the door and knocks! Within there are sounds of crying mingled with prayer, and without, a crowd of people still hanging about the residence. Jesus tenderly knocks. But the door opens not. They hear the soft tapping at the entrance, but it may be the attempt of some



FOR JUDGMENT I AM COME INTO THIS WORLD.

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intrusive stranger to come in upon their sorrow, or it may be the shaking of the wind. And overwhelmed by grief, it does not occur to them that either the Lord, or the Son of God, would be their friend.

Again he raps with more decisive blows. For a moment the sighing within ceases and the prayers are hushed, as the inmates hesitate whether to open the door or to remain secluded.

Once again he knocks, with a heavy rap that makes the door tremble, and with the decision of one having authority.

They can resist no longer. The father lifts the latch of the door suspiciously, and quietly opens it but a little way. As he peers forth into the street his eyes rest upon the most benign countenance that man ever wore. It can be no officer of the law! it can be no curious Pharisee! it can be no persecutor! Those benevolent eyes could belong only to a man compassionate—a friend of the suffering poor.

The door opens wider. The stranger at the threshold smiles. Wide open swings the door. “Enter, stranger, you are welcome.”

With a step clearly indicating that he fully knows why he is there, and has some express mission to perform, and with a smiling greeting, as though he was an old friend, Jesus enters into the shadowy apartment and places his strong though beautiful hand upon the head of poor Bo.

Bo had ceased to cry aloud, and was there in silence, almost angry that any person should assume to interrupt him in the pain of his deep disgrace.

The mother first greets the Divine One, then speaks to her son and bids him welcome the stranger. Then with a feeling of excited curiosity he could scarce restrain, he almost forgot himself in the strangeness of the interview. He gazed at his visitor, not yet fully able to trust his eyesight, in a questioning way, which Jesus fully understood.

The soft tones of that voice now speak for the first time within that home, and say to him : " Dost thou believe on the Son of God ? "

The question, the manner, the indescribable, silent influence of the visitor, all had their effect upon little Bo. He quickly, but reverently responded : " Who is he, Lord ? that I might believe on him, for I have never seen him ? I have had my sight but a short time, and I know not who the Son of God may be ? "

" But the Son of God, of whom I spake, is the person who made clay and anointed your eyes and told you to wash in the pool of Siloam. Dost thou believe on him ? "

" Where is he, rabbi, that I may see him and know him ? "

The Jesus then said unto him : " Thou hast not only seen him, but it is he that talketh with thee now. "

The very voice carried the conviction of its truth with it to the deepest recesses of the boy's soul. He felt what he could not explain, that he was in the presence of one divine. His gratitude for having received his sight, and his increased sense of obligation, now that his great friend had sought him out so diligently in this the hour of his deeper disgrace, all combined to overwhelm him with a confusion of reverence, grief, curiosity, and worship that led him to fall

at once to the floor, and prostrate himself before the stranger, reiterating in the humblest and most emphatic manner his belief that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. He worshiped him.

"Art thou he that healed my son? Art thou the Galilean prophet of whom we have so many times heard?" asks the bewildered mother. Then she too falls down to worship him.

"Art thou he that should come, of whom John the Baptist did speak, and of whom Isaiah did write?" asks the still hesitating father. One look from those eyes, one silent nod from that head, and the father too is convinced. Kneeling upon the floor, he places his head at Jesus' feet, clasping the feet, as weepingly he exclaims, "Our friend and our Lord."

As when the morning sun lights up the hills and makes the husbandman forget the gloomy dreams of the night, and enter singing into his fields, so the coming of that wondrous Helper into this poor home had dispersed every sense of sorrow and every cry of disgrace. Their tears did not cease, but they became tears of bliss. Their cries were not altogether hushed, but now there were exclamations of almost painful joy. Jesus had found his sheep. The Shepherd was carrying them in his arms.

The news that Jesus had visited that humble spot, and that he had braved the denunciations of the Sanhedrin, to associate with one who had just been cast out of the synagogue, spread quickly through the streets. The crowd increased about the door, and the Pharisees who were following him about to catch him, in some form or other to convict him of crime, that they might crucify him, soon

rapped at the door and demanded admission. The door was opened, and into that room flocked those officials in their gay attire, followed by many a curious scribe, while Levite and temple guards pressed about the door.

Jesus had lifted up the worshiper, and placed his arm about the form of little Bo. He stands between him and his enemies, and demands of them why they come.

They asked in return the question: "Why art thou here, presuming to be a friend of one whom the great council of the nation has declared to be a heretic? He has been before the judges. Judgment has been passed upon him. Why art thou here, to comfort, to counsel, or to strengthen him?"

We can see the Divine One ask, with lips compressed, cheeks flushed, and eyes flashing with indignation, yet fully under control, and we can hear his clear defense of little Bo, and vindication of his own position. "For judgment also am I come into the world, that they which see not may see, and that they which see might be made blind. I am come into the world to be a friend of the poor, and to give light to those that sit in darkness. I have come to open the eyes of the blind. I have come to convict of their sins those who, having physical sight, are nevertheless mentally and spiritually blind."

As he turns his flashing eyes upon the proud Pharisees and Levites, and emphasizes with peculiar tones, "those who are mentally and spiritually blind," we can see the wagging of their indignant heads, we can hear the half-surprised expression of indigna-



ARE WE BLIND ALSO?

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tion, and at last the general cry going up from them all as they hurl back to him his insinuations: "Are we blind also? We, who are Moses' disciples; we, who belong to the stock of Israel; we, whom God has led through the wilderness and preserved unto the present time, and to whom he especially promises a divine Messiah; do you dare insinuate that we do not see?"

Then with a voice so piercing that the crowd down the narrow alley and away to the street can hear his denunciation, and feel a shivering sense of the wrath divine, he declares to them: "If ye were blind, as this little Bo was blind, ye would not be answerable for many sins which are now clearly laid to your charge. Ye say, 'we see,' therefore your sin remaineth. Ye say that ye know the right way, that ye understand the path of righteousness, that the Lord has given you superior light. Ye say that ye have all authority. Ye say that ye have all wisdom, and therefore condemn yourselves, for the light is come into the world, and this is your condemnation, that ye love darkness rather than light. Ye have eyes, and ye do not use them; ye have intelligence, and ye misapply it; ye have every opportunity to secure forgiveness for your sins, and ye will not use it; ye have special privileges of caring for the poor and befriending the friendless, and ye use your position, time, and talents to oppose the afflicted, to add burdens to those who are heavy laden, to darken the eyes of those who otherwise would see. Ye enter not in yourself, and those who are entering ye hinder. Ye say ye now see. Therefore, your sin remaineth."

It was long ago that little Bo sat at the corner begging in his blindness ; yes, long, long ago, it seems to us.

The walls that then surrounded the holy city have crumbled and been more than once rebuilt. The temple has long since disappeared. Even Olivet is changed by the action of the elements and the effects of time. Siloam itself is but a broken ruin in the valley. The fountains which filled it have been often turned another way by some besieging army. The heated contests of destructive battles have again and again filled the valley and streets and squares with rubbish, until now, after the centuries gone, all that pertains to that time seems to be buried. A poor, beggarly sight, Jerusalem left desolate indeed, stands as a broken monument of the greatness that once was, and of the opportunities once wasted. But little Bo lives. He, being dead, yet speaketh. He lives on earth through the story of his suffering and triumph, and millions and millions have thanked the Lord for the record he left of himself, and for the lessons which his touching story inculcates.

It was long ago. Even the genealogy of his family is lost. Even the Jewish nation has been scattered over the earth. It was long, long ago. And yet to him who now feels as Jesus feels, and who inherits the promise that when he leaves this world he shall be like Jesus, one day is as a thousand years. But two days ago little Bo was a poor, blind beggar, now a bright-winged messenger of God, now dwelling in heavenly mansions in a light that can never be dimmed, with an eyesight that can see all the farther borders of the mighty universe, and endowed with eternal life. He continually



THEREFORE YOUR SIN REMAINETH.

praises God now that he permitted him to be born blind and allowed him to suffer on the earth as he did suffer. For he clearly understands now that he was of far more use as a blind beggar, in his poverty and wretchedness, than have been many potentates of the earth, with uncounted treasures at their command, with mighty armies obeying their orders, and with wide-spreading realms rendering them almost worshipful obedience. "Jesus doeth all things well."



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